

News From Congressman Joe Sestak

eNewsletter –July 18, 2009

Dear Constituents of the 7th District,

Our efforts both in Washington and here in the 7th District to overcome the economic challenges we face together continued throughout June and into July. Congress took an important step toward building a green economy with the passage of the

American Clean Energy and Security Act

. The Act begins to move the country in the direction of utilizing renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar power, and creating new green jobs. Earlier in the month, I met with the Chamber of Commerce of Greater West Chester to address the concerns of local small business and industry leaders and to provide an update on the use of stimulus funding

. To promote resources available to my constituents in difficult economic times, I am hosting a Working Family Resources Summit where government and non-government experts and organizations will help guide constituents to the options available to them, addressing everything from adult education to credit counseling. I invite you to attend the event on August 1

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at Interboro High School.

As a member of the Education and Labor Committee – one of my three House Committees involved with major health care legislation – I am continuing my efforts to advocate for the

comprehensive reform we need. We passed landmark legislation that would ensure affordable health coverage for millions of uninsured Americans, and institute market reforms to make health insurance more competitive and more affordable for individuals and small businesses. I also addressed the subject at the Health Care for America Now (HCAN) Pennsylvania Town Hall. In Pennsylvania, health care costs have risen 86 percent between 2001 and 2007, while wages have increased only 13 percent. I expressed my support for a public plan that would compete fairly with private insurers, subject to the same rules, regulations and requirements as all other plans and paid for by individuals' premiums and copayments, not general government revenue.

Another notable health care development in Washington was my announcement establishing a new House Pediatric Cancer Caucus. The Caucus will provide a bi-partisan forum to discuss legislation addressing pediatric cancer and give a voice to the children and families battling this devastating illness.

In addition, our military service members and Veterans have been a focus of my legislative efforts this past month. I authored ten amendments in the **National Defense Authorization Act** to better equip our military and provide our service members and their families the benefits they deserve. One provision mandates the treatment of autism under TRICARE, the military's primary healthcare provider, recognizing the hardships military families with autistic children have faced. Additionally, I voted to pass the

Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Act

, which, among other provisions, provides \$533 million to expand eligibility to "Priority 8" Veterans, who were improperly excluded from the VA in 2003 and often have trouble affording health care. I also supported the

Homes for Heroes Act

, which addresses the needs of homeless Veterans, who, according to the VA, comprise approximately one third of adults on the streets. This is a staggering statistic and this legislation includes millions of dollars for military housing development

At home, I thoroughly enjoyed celebrating Independence Day with families across my District, take part in a variety of events, from parades, to picnics, to glittering fireworks displays. Read about some of my other activities in the District below.

In addition to the legislation I have helped pass and the events in which I have participated, I believe it is important you know where I stand and for what I am advocating in regard to key national and international issues. I invite you to hear me discuss:

rebuilding our economy;

(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQHs4QAN3no&feature=channel_page)

appropriate financial regulation;

(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=75n4OgoljBs&feature=channel_page)

how to approach comprehensive health care reform that covers everyone and addresses costs;

(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GNBKlbCJg9w&feature=channel_page)

(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpEcA1Bpvmg&feature=channel_page)

our necessary, deliberate withdrawal from Iraq;

(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZFwINARw3Lw&feature=channel_page)

how to diplomatically engage Iran;

(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-vFCJIQ6NUE&feature=channel_page)

(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sFuAp01XWs4&feature=channel_page)

the need to repeal the military's Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy;

(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b3SMhgHDAPQ&feature=channel_page)

and the importance of the House-passed energy legislation.

(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAQoCOpJA8Y&feature=channel_page)

Congressman Joe Sestak is now on Twitter. You can receive updates on the Congressman's daily events as well as links to information about legislation, YouTube

clips and photographs from around the District. Sign up at <http://www.twitter.com/JoeSestak>

**For the most complete and up-to-date information on Congressman Sestak's work in Washington and in the 7th Congressional District, please visit <http://sestak.house.gov>. For help with a problem for which the Congressman can offer assistance, please call his District Office at 610-892-8623.*

Please do not respond to this email.

To send an email to Congressman Sestak, please

visit http://www.sestak.house.gov/IMA/issue_subscribe.shtml.

Working Families Resources Summit

Providing Essential Resources to Working Families: As a result of our Nation's extraordinary economic recession, I have seen families throughout my District struggle across three generations to cope with historically high unemployment, record foreclosure rates, loss of pension plans, devalued homes, rising education costs, expensive health care, and the

ever-present threat of increased energy prices. Although I am aggressively working with my colleagues in Congress to address these issues legislatively, and through my constituent office to engage the unique problems of individuals, I believe more must be done. To that end, I am committed to networking the many organizations in our region that are chartered to help citizens weather difficult times and I am pleased to invite you to the first gathering of those remarkable organizations at the 7th Congressional District Working Families Resources Summit that I am hosting on Saturday, August 1, 2009 at Interboro High School.

This summit will feature a panel discussion and a question and answer session followed by a service fair that connects community members with government agencies, non-government organizations, and local resources. Service fair exhibitors will cover a variety of issues including housing relief, employment, adult education, credit counseling, legal issues, elder and child care, health services, Veterans benefits, and more. You can find more information and register for the Summit online at: http://www.sestak.house.gov/upcoming_events.shtml

Inaction Not an Option on Health Care

Taking a Major Step toward Comprehensive Legislation: I proudly helped the Education and Labor Committee pass the American Affordable Health Choice's Act (AAHCA). AAHCA allows individuals to keep the private insurance they have now, while also establishing a new Health Insurance Exchange of additional private plans. The Exchange will create a transparent and functional marketplace for individuals and small employers to purchase insurance plans, one where all small businesses can benefit from the lower premiums larger employers currently enjoy. Among the many private insurance options, the Exchange will also include a public

health insurance option – sustained only by premiums and co-payments of those in the option – that will utilize its lower administrative costs (e.g. its not-for-profit status and lack of CEO salary) to increase competition in the insurance industry -- while operating on a level playing field, and being subject to the same requirements as any other plan in the Exchange.

The bill mandates that individuals purchase insurance with limited exceptions, while taking steps to aide small businesses. Government would be responsible for ensuring that every American has access to quality health insurance by providing subsidies to qualifying low- and middle-income families and expanding Medicaid so more individuals in poverty can participate in the program.

http://sestak.house.gov/apps/list/press/pa07_sestak/090717_HealthReform.shtml

Addressing the Need for Reform, Including a Public Option, at HCAN Rally: I made the case for health care reform at the Health Care for America Now (HCAN) Pennsylvania Town Hall, part of HCAN's "We Can't Wait" Day of Action. Speaking to 750 union members, community group members, religious members and other activists from Pennsylvania, I discussed the growing number of uninsured – no fewer than seven million added to the rolls this decade – and the fact that costs in Pennsylvania have risen 86 percent between 2001 and 2007 while wages have increased only 13 percent. With health care costs escalating, millions of Americans are unable to get the care they need and many are being forced into bankruptcy trying to get it. Worse yet, health care costs are taking over our economy and will represent one fifth of our gross domestic product in the next decade. The status quo is unsustainable. We need health care reform now.

As part of health reform, I support the inclusion of a public plan that competes on a level playing

field with private insurers, is subject to the same rules, regulations, and requirements as all other plans; and pays for care from individuals' premiums and copayments -- not general government revenue. Competition and transparency in our health care system will drive down costs and a public plan is an important part of meeting those standards.

http://sestak.house.gov/list/press/pa07_sestak/090626_healthcare.shtml

Comprehensive Energy Legislation

Passing the American Clean Energy and Security Act: The American Clean Energy and Security Act continues to move this country toward a future powered by renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power. While not perfect, it is a long needed step in the right direction. Two weeks ago, I raised concerns with Speaker Nancy Pelosi because I believed the bill did not go far enough to encourage renewable and non-emitting power sources. However, I voted for this bill because it makes real progress by investing in the transformation and strengthening of our economy, restoring the country into a position of leadership as global climate change talks start this fall in Copenhagen, and takes strides toward mitigating the negative affects of climate change. Importantly, the Act also provides protections for consumers, especially those who are the most economically vulnerable.

I do not want to be on the wrong side of history. Fifteen EPA administrators have made clear the need to address global warming and the provisions of this bill not only make environmental

sense, but also economic and strategic sense. We need to spark an unprecedented transition to alternative, clean, and renewable power, to create a new clean energy economy and halt damage to our environment. Last year's spike in the cost of gasoline, not to mention all of the other instances in which energy prices have hurt us economically in the last three decades, provides a clear signal that the days of our reliance on fossil fuels must end. In Pennsylvania, clean energy companies like Iberdola, Conergy and Gamesa have brought hundreds of new jobs. It is time to lay the framework for far-reaching and sustainable solutions.

http://sestak.house.gov/list/press/pa07_sestak/PR_090626_CapTrade.shtml

Announcing the House Pediatric Cancer Caucus

Opening the Childhood Cancer Rally: Among hundreds of children, parents, nurses and concerned citizens, I opened CureSearch's "Rally to Reach the Day," and announced the establishment of a new House Pediatric Cancer Caucus. Tragically, cancer is the leading cause of death by disease in children and, although long term survival rates are fairly high, three out of five children suffer from long term side affects. I firmly believe that it is only through the collaboration of the government, private organizations like CureSerach, doctors, and the families affected by this devastating illness that we can come closer to finding a cure. The establishment of the House Pediatric Cancer Caucus is a significant step forward that will give voices to thousands of sick children and represent the struggles of every family battling the disease. The mission of the Pediatric Cancer Caucus, which I will co-chair, is to serve as a clearinghouse for information on pediatric cancer and a bipartisan forum to aid members of Congress in working together to address pediatric cancer. As the first initiative of the caucus, I will be introducing a House resolution commemorating Pediatric Cancer Awareness Day in September.

http://www.sestak.house.gov/list/press/pa07_sestak/090623_PedCaucus.shtml

Addressing the Needs of Service Members and their Families

Improving autism care for military families: I authored an amendment that was included in the House-passed National Defense Authorization Act to mandate the treatment of autism under TRICARE, the military's primary healthcare provider. Its provisions address problems with the current law, under which the military's Extended Care Health Option provides limited coverage as only five percent of eligible children receive care because of excessive delays and arbitrary coverage denials. Autism is a disease that strikes 1 in every 150 American children, and is more common than pediatric cancer, diabetes, and AIDS combined. It is unacceptable that 1 in 84 military families are reported to have a child with autism, but receive less than 16 of the 25 minimum recommended hours of therapy. This legislation builds on an amendment I introduced which was signed into law last year that increased autism coverage 20 percent under TRICAREs' Extended Care Health Option (ECHO) from \$2,500 per month to \$36,000 per year (\$3,000 per month).

http://sestak.house.gov/list/press/pa07_sestak/090625_MilAut.shtml

Including Provisions in the National Defense Authorization Act: To provide our service members and their families the benefits they deserve, and to ensure our military is equipped and in a proper state of readiness to deal with 21st century challenges, I supported the Fiscal

Year 2010 National Defense Authorization Act, which was approved by the House Armed Services Committee. In total, HR 2647 authorizes \$550.4 billion in budget authority for the Department of Defense (DOD) and the national security programs of the Department of Energy. In the bill, I authored ten amendments to deal with specific areas in which the military must improve to keep our nation safe and offer the men and women who wear the cloth of this nation – and their families – the care they deserve.

In addition to the amendment mandating autism treatment under TRICARE, the legislation I included in the bill addresses: providing better mental and physical care for our troops, with one related amendment focusing on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder; improving casualty care research by establishing a National Casualty Care Research Center; enhancing critical neuroscience research by establishing a Visiting NIH Senior Neuroscience Fellowship Program; transforming the military to one that is more “knowledge-intensive” in an era when dominance of cyberspace is critical; studying the use of thorium-liquid fueled nuclear reactors for naval power; ensuring fair restitution for American prisoners of war and their families; improving military dental care; enhancing the efficiency of military equipment; and increasing transparency at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC).

http://www.sestak.house.gov/list/press/pa07_sestak/090619_Defense.shtml

Funding the Needs of our Veterans

Passing the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Act: It is our moral obligation to ensure that the men and women who wore the cloth of this nation receive the best possible treatment for themselves and their families. The Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Act recognizes areas that require improvement and provides critical funds to meet these needs. The legislation calls for advanced funding for VA health programs for the first time by providing \$48.2 billion for FY 2011, a measure that was strongly advocated for by Veterans' organizations. The bill also appropriates an additional \$533 million to expand eligibility to an estimated 266,000 "Priority 8" Veterans, who were improperly excluded from the VA in 2003 and often have trouble affording health care. Other provisions in the bill include \$108.9 billion, \$14.5 billion above 2009, for Veterans medical care, claims processors, and facility improvements.

http://sestak.house.gov/list/press/pa07_sestak/090710_vetfunds.shtml

[use.gov/list/press/pa07_sestak/090710_vetfunds.shtml](http://sestak.house.gov/list/press/pa07_sestak/090710_vetfunds.shtml)

Passing the Homes for Heroes Act: According to the Veterans Administration, about one-third of the adult homeless population are Veterans, with current population estimates suggesting that about 154,000 Veterans are homeless on any given night. Many other Veterans are considered near homeless or at risk because of their poverty, lack of support from family and friends, and dismal living conditions in cheap hotels or in overcrowded or substandard housing. As one critical step to address homelessness among Veterans, I cosponsored and helped the House pass the Homes for Heroes Act, HR 403. The bill would provide shelter for homeless Veterans and their families, and will help prevent low-income families from falling into homelessness. Specifically, the bill establishes a supportive housing program at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for low-income Veterans, authorizing \$200 million in FY 2008 for a HUD assistance program for low-income Veterans.

http://sestak.house.gov/list/press/pa07_sestak/090616_lowincomevets.shtml

Independence Day

Celebrating the 4th of July at Events around the District: I kicked off my slate of Independence Day events by marching in the Marple Newtown Parade. Crisscrossing West Chester Pike, I was privileged to greet many of the thousands of my constituents lined up on a packed parade route, which stretched approximately two miles, from St. Alban's Circle to the Broomall Fire Company. Next, I headed to Chester County to meet with families and enjoy the Fourth of July festivities at Easttown Township's annual picnic behind the township library, one of the highlights of my busy Independence Day. I enjoyed the opportunity to return to the event and speak with the 500 attendees. Next, I continued my commemoration of Independence Day at the annual Upper Merion celebration, speaking at Heuser Park about the significance of remembering July Fourth and enjoying the opportunity to meet one-on-one with constituents, whether just to exchange greetings or hear about the issues most important to them. I ended the day in Radnor, greeting many constituents at the Township's fireworks celebration.

Other Events

Traveling the District to address topics of interest to constituents: I participated in numerous other events throughout my District to offer as many constituents as possible with the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback. These activities included a forum organized by the Chamber of Commerce of Greater West Chester where I discussed my most recent work in Washington and at home in light of the economic crisis, the worst the country has faced since

the Great Depression. With 760 small businesses lost in the Seventh District alone even before this latest crisis, from 2001-2006, I took the opportunity to address the concerns of local small business and industry leaders and to offer a vision of rebuilding the nation's economy. I also visited with Malvern Fire Fighters at their annual banquet. I am always proud to stand among our community's fire fighters as they set an example of selfless service to others. Their careers truly epitomize the 'dignity of danger' as they risk their lives daily to protect their neighbors.

Showing support for our Veterans at Walk for Wounded: It is with tremendous pride that our Nation sends its sons and daughters to serve, and it should not only be with gratitude, but also practical support and guidance, that we welcome them home. I attended the second annual Walk for the Wounded on June 14

to express my encouragement for the cause and appreciation for the organizers of the event. The walk aimed to raise awareness about the hardships wounded soldiers face when they return home as well as funds to help support them. Operation First Response, a Non-Profit Organization which helps provide emotional and financial support to wounded Veterans and their families, organized the incredible walk which spanned 2 miles and attracted more than 1,000 citizens.

Announcements

Veterans Benefits Guide Available

The latest edition of the VA's [Federal Benefits for Veterans, Dependents and Survivors](#) has been released. The guide provides important updated information on changes in eligibility for VA medical care and benefits in addition to other federal benefits, including disability compensation, pension and life insurance. Major modifications include the addition of "Survivors" to the title and details on the Post-9/11 GI Bill signed into law in 2008. Printed copies can be ordered from the [Government Printing Office](#) at \$5 a copy.

<http://www.military.com/military-report/veterans-benefits-guide-available>

Job Training Grants for Veterans

The Department of Labor has awarded 98 grants to provide approximately 15,000 Veterans with job training to help them transition successfully into civilian careers. The grants, totaling more than \$25 million, are being awarded under the U.S. Department of Labor's Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP). Grantees under the HVRP program network coordinate their efforts with various local, state and federal social service providers. For more information on the Department's unemployment and re-employment programs for Veterans, visit the [Department of Labor](#) website, where you can also find a listing of [HVRP Grantees](#).

<http://www.military.com/veterans-report/job-training-grants-for-veterans>

Attention Summer Travelers

This summer, the State Department begins to enforce new passport regulations. As of June 1, 2009, U.S. citizens must present a passport book, passport card, or other travel documents approved by the U.S. government to enter the United States from Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Bermuda at all land borders and sea ports of entry. For complete details about the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative visit http://travel.state.gov/travel/cbpmc/cbpmc_2223.html

All other US passport information, including how to apply and track your application, is available on the Department of State's website: <http://travel.state.gov> .

Although standard passport processing is currently taking about 4-6 weeks, the new Travel Initiative, combined with the expected seasonal increases in demand, will undoubtedly cause longer processing times. Therefore, I recommend that you apply for your passport well before planned travel.

If you have additional questions about the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative or passport processing, please contact my district representative, Eve Massa, at eve.massa@mail.house.gov

Student Loan Aid

The U.S. Department of Education has organized a program to help those having trouble paying off their student loans. Income-based repayment (IBR) is designed to assist the repayment of student loans by spreading monthly payments over a period of twenty-five years – or ten, if choosing to work in public service – with each payment capped according to the individual's income. The program is designed to lessen debt-related stress for those with federal student loans. Only loans made to students qualify; loans made to parents or by private lenders do not qualify. Eligibility for entry into the program is based on income and loan size. For those making over \$16,000 a year, monthly payments would total less than ten percent of their income; those earning under \$16,000 would not be required to make any payments, as long as they remain under this cutoff. To apply for IBR, contact the loan lender directly. Check out www.ibrinfo.com for more information on how to apply for IBR and to find out about eligibility. To apply for Income-Based Repayment, contact your lender directly.